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AND OTHER PLAYS

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FELIX GOULD

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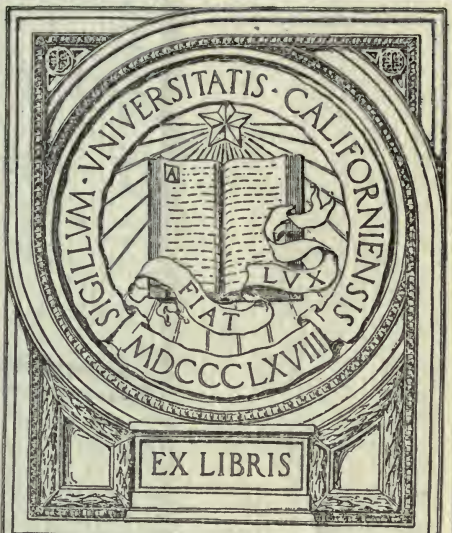

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THE MARSH MAIDEN

AND OTHER PLAYS

THE CONTEMPORARY SERIES

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THE MARSH MAIDEN — *And Other Plays*
By *Felix Gould*

THE MARSH MAIDEN

AND OTHER PLAYS

By

FELIX GOULD

Author of
"The Jewels of Isis"

BOSTON
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
1918

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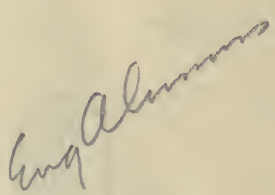

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THE MARSH MAIDEN

To

STANLEY ROLAND

THE MARSH MAIDEN

CHARACTERS

The Peat-Gatherer
The Mother
The Child: Aloys

The Dog

The Marsh Maiden
The Voice of the Little Lost Brother
The Voice of the Cypress
The Voice of the Willow
The Voices of the Lilies
The Voices of the Reeds
The Voice of the Owl
The Voices of the Frogs

The scene is the living room of the Peat-Gatherer's home, furnished in the typical heavy peasant style. There is a table at the right against the wall, some benches, a spinning wheel, and a tall, dark cupboard filled with blue dishes and woodware. Other benches are scattered about the room. At the left stands a ponderous chest of antique design and curiously carved, forming a sort of altar to the crucifix above.

Twilight has already fallen. No lamp is burning, but the room is faintly illuminated by the glow from the fire-place. At times the firelight flickers unsteadily, throwing fantastic and menacing shadows on the wall, but these as night approaches become less distinct and mass themselves in the background around the chest on which the child is lying. Through the low window above this chest one can vaguely see the marshes in the distance.

The Peat-Gatherer's wife is seated on a bench at the feet of the child, motionless and with eyes half closed. Whenever the child moves feverishly, she rises with a start and bends over him listening to his breathing. She turns suddenly and with quick, noiseless steps made not without effort, goes to the door and opens it softly.

THE MOTHER

[*In a low voice.*]

He is sleeping. Do not let the dog in. He wakes at the slightest sound.

[*The Peat-Gatherer comes in.*]

He has been sleeping for more than an hour.

[*They go softly to the child's side.*]

THE PEAT-GATHERER

His cheeks are burning.

THE MOTHER

Do not touch him! Do not touch him! It is the fever. He wakes when he is touched.

THE PEAT-GATHERER

I will not touch him . . . How rapidly he breathes, and how his little chest heaves!

THE MOTHER

You will wake him. Come away. See, he is becoming restless again. He heard our voices. Do not speak so loudly.

THE PEAT-GATHERER

Was Mère Angèle here today? I told her . . .

THE MOTHER

Yes . . . I think he is going to wake. Let us go. away. Perhaps he will sleep.

THE PEAT-GATHERER

What did she do?

THE MOTHER

She brought some herbs . . . Wait, I will give you your soup . . . She brought some herbs and made something, some kind of tea. She brewed it very strong . . . The bread is in the cupboard . . . But he would not touch it because it was very bitter. I tasted it . . . Do not make that noise with the knife. I believe the fever would leave him if he would drink it . . . He is waking . . .

[*They both rise.*]

Bring me some water. He is thirsty. There is some in your cup. He is burning with fever.

[*She bends over him with the cup and raises him.*]

Drink, Aloys . . . Aloys . . .

[*At the same moment, the Marsh Maiden appears at the window. She is wondrously beautiful and bears in her hands a large bowl of the color of the sky when it is bright moonlight. The bowl is studded with twinkling stars that vanish softly and come back again.*]

THE PEAT-GATHERER

Is he drinking?

THE MOTHER

No, he is gazing out of the window. He is smiling. Drink, Aloys . . . Aloys.

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Drink, Aloys . . . Aloys . . .

[*She puts the wonderful bowl to his lips.*]

THE MOTHER

He is swallowing the water in great gulps. The fever makes him thirsty.

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Little Aloys, do you hear the cool water flowing over the white pebbles . . . so cool . . . so fresh . . . so cold . . . falling on the rocks? Do you hear it singing? Do you hear it, dear little Aloys?

ALOYS

Yes . . . It is singing . . . It is singing . . .

THE MARSH MAIDEN

And Aloys, can you see the little gold fish? They are swimming! Oh Aloys, they are swimming to you! They are coming to you!

ALOYS

[*With a little cry of delight.*]

They are coming to me . . . . That one . . . that shines . . . Oh . . .

THE PEAT-GATHERER

What is he saying?

THE MOTHER

I do not understand. It is the fever that makes him speak. Take the cup.

THE PEAT-GATHERER

His eyes are wide open . . .

THE MOTHER

He sees nothing. He does not know we are near.

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Little Aloys . . . The marshes . . . The marshes, Aloys . . .

THE MOTHER

He is smiling.

THE MARSH MAIDEN

The marshes, Aloys . . . dark and cool . . . green . . .

THE PEAT-GATHERER

Perhaps he recognizes us. Aloys . . .

THE MOTHER

Hush! He will begin to cry.

THE VOICE OF THE LITTLE LOST BROTHER

Oh Aloys . . . Aloys, little brother . . .

THE VOICE OF THE WILLOW

Sorrow . . . Sorrow . . . Sorrow . . . Tears . . .

THE VOICE OF THE CYPRESS

[*In deep, bell-like tones.*]

Down at my roots . . . Ah, Aloys . . . at my roots!

THE PEAT-GATHERER

His eyes are closing.

THE MOTHER

He is falling asleep again.

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Little Aloys! Little Aloys! The marshes . . .

THE PEAT-GATHERER

He is smiling.

THE MARSH MAIDEN

The mar . . . shes! Oh Al . . . oys . . .

[*She is no longer seen.*]

THE MOTHER

He is going to sleep for a long time now. He always does when I give him water.

ALOYS

The marshes . . . Oh . . the mar . . shes . . .

THE PEAT-GATHERER

The marshes . . . Did you hear? He spoke of the marshes!

THE MOTHER

[*With an effort.*]

He is . . . He is only dreaming.

[*Suddenly.*]

You found him under the great willow?

THE PEAT-GATHERER

He was lying among the lilies with his arms around their stems. The willow was touching him with its long branches and the mists were gathering around him. I thought he was drowned like . . . the other. It was by a miracle that he was not drowned.

THE MOTHER

[*She stares unseeing before her.*]

He is drawn to the spot, and it is I who have given him that strange longing for it, that longing for the marshes. It is I. It is I. Even before he was born, while he slept under my heart I made that longing a part of his life.

He does not love the sunshine. He trembles in the light. He smiles only in the evening. They say that he . . . But they know nothing! Nothing! I know. I know. Perhaps if I had gone that day . . . If you had let me go to the marshes when that man saw . . . the other . . . near the willow . . . it would not have been so. But you would not let me go. And so the

other was always in my thoughts. Always. Always. I began to picture him as they said . . . Oh, I could not believe that I should never see him again, not even his little body. At night I dreamed of him. I dreamed I saw him under the willow in the marshes. In the morning the marshes were before my eyes. All day . . .

They tortured me. I longed to go to them, to that spot to find him. They were always before me . . . green . . . silent . . . poisonous . . . like a great sleeping serpent. I suffered in my longing. Then he was born . . . [*A long silence.*]

THE PEAT-GATHERER

[*With emotion.*]

Do not speak of such things. Do not think of them.

[*He rises abruptly and goes outside to close the windows. The room becomes very dark. He returns to his bench and leans against the wall, leaving the door slightly open. Gradually the full moon rises. One can see the light faintly through the curtains of the windows. Neither speaks. After a while one can see their forms like silhouettes in the darkness. They become motionless. They are asleep. A ray of moonlight falls upon the child who begins to toss feverishly. A light scratching is heard, the door is pushed open and the dog comes in. The Marsh Maiden is seen standing on the threshold in the full golden light of the moon. The dog lies down before the fire-place and falls asleep. The Marsh Maiden enters. She seems to carry the moonlight with her.*]

THE MARSH MAIDEN

[*Softly.*]

Aloys . . . Little Aloys, I have come . . .

ALOYS

Your lips are so cool . . .

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Little Aloys, look!

[*She touches the windows lightly, they open and in the distance one sees the marshes, flooded with a soft mellow light.*]

ALOYS

[*With a cry of ineffable happiness.*]

Oh . . .

THE MARSH MAIDEN

The marshes . . . The marshes are waking to life. They wake at night, always at night. Listen!

[*From the distance comes a confused hum of voices.*]

THE VOICES OF THE FROGS

Coäx! Coäx! Coäx!

ALOYS

The Frogs! It is the Frogs!

THE VOICE OF THE OWL

Who? Who? Who?

ALOYS

The Owl! The Owl! The little Owl that lives in the Cypress!

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Listen . . . The Lilies . . .

A LILY

Oh golden moonlight, your touch has turned my heart to gold!

ANOTHER LILY

Oh silver starlight, your touch has turned my petals to silver!

A WATER LILY

I have two drops of dew nestling in my heart . . .

ANOTHER WATER LILY

Oh, I am trembling . . . I am trembling . . . I am opening a bud . . .

ANOTHER WATER LILY

My chalice is filled with pearls, real pearls . . .

A REED

It is only the dew . . .

THE VOICES OF THE REEDS

Oh Breeze of Night! Oh Breeze soft blowing! Sway us . . . Bend us . . . caress us . . .

THE VOICE OF THE LITTLE LOST BROTHER

Aloys . . . Aloys . . .

THE VOICE OF THE WILLOW

Sorrow . . . Sorrow . . . Sorrow . . . Tears . . .

THE VOICE OF THE CYPRESS

[*In deep, bell-like tones.*]

Down at my roots . . . Ah, Aloys . . . at my roots . . .

THE VOICE OF THE LITTLE LOST BROTHER

Aloys, come!

THE VOICES OF THE LILIES

[*Singing.*]

Come!

THE VOICES OF THE REEDS

[*Sighing.*]

Come, oh come!

THE VOICE OF THE WILLOW

[*Weeping.*]

Come! Come!

THE VOICE OF THE CYPRESS

[*In deep, bell-like tones.*]

Down at my roots . . . At my roots, Aloys!

THE VOICE OF THE LITTLE LOST BROTHER

Aloys, I have beautiful shells . . .

ALOYS

[*Descending from the chest.*]

I am coming! I am coming!

THE VOICES OF THE LILIES

[*Singing.*]

He is coming! He is coming!

THE VOICES OF THE REEDS

[*Sighing.*]

He is coming . . .

THE VOICE OF THE WILLOW

[*Weeping.*]

He is coming . . .

THE VOICE OF THE CYPRESS

[*In deep, bell-like tones.*]

Down at my roots! Ah . . . Aloys!

THE MARSH MAIDEN

Aloys, give me your hand! Come, we will go! Come!
Come to the marshes . . . to the marshes!

ALOYS

I am coming! I am coming!

THE MARSH MAIDEN

To the marshes . . .

[*She takes the hand of Aloys and both pass out through the door.*]

ALOYS

To the marshes!

[*They pass the window and are seen to disappear in the distance. The Peat-Gatherer and his wife still sleep.*]

THE PLAY ENDS

THE STRANGER

To

MESROP NEVTON, KHAN

THE STRANGER

CHARACTERS

THE FATHER
THE MOTHER
THEIR DAUGHTER, MADELEINE
HER BETROTHED, HENRI
THE STRANGER

The scene is before the house. In the background, and stretching far into the horizon, the marshes. It is late afternoon. The sun is already hidden behind the great fantastic masses of dead vegetation which changes its appearance and color as twilight and night come on.

The Father and the Mother are seated on a long stone bench.

THE FATHER

It is true. She is very pale. I fear she is ill . . . but she will not tell us. She does not wish to grieve us.

THE MOTHER

I have often found her weeping . . .

THE FATHER

She has never suffered before, to have the strength to bear her grief.

THE MOTHER

They were always together, the two . . . They seemed to have one soul . . .

THE FATHER

Our kisses are not her kisses . . .

THE MOTHER

We must not allow her to take those solitary walks. I believe she walks among the marshes. Henri met her there when he came by the marsh road one evening.

THE FATHER

She wishes to be alone, always alone. Grief seeks solitude.

THE MOTHER

We must try to soften her sorrow. We must not show her ours.

THE FATHER

Yes, though every movement, every word, recalls the other.

THE MOTHER

She takes no pleasure in her doves. She does not caress them or feed them from her lips, or kiss them. Her only pleasure is solitude. It would be cruel to tell her, and yet . . .

THE FATHER

We must tell her. I shall tell her myself.

THE MOTHER

Have you seen how her cheeks burn when she returns, and how bright her eyes become?

THE FATHER

No . . . I have seen nothing. Nothing! You only imagine . . . Do not weep. It is only the exertion of walking. Yes, it is only the exertion. She walks a great distance. It is nothing. Only . . . she is very weak. It is true she is weak. She is so young. Do not be alarmed.

THE MOTHER

So the strange malady that robbed her of her sister appeared. She drooped like a lily . . . even as she now . . . They cannot be without each other, even in death. She is calling her . . .

THE FATHER

We must not have these thoughts. Perhaps, after all, we deceive ourselves. God is good . . .

THE MOTHER

She has become so dear to me, the last one . . . the only one left to us . . .

THE FATHER

So dear . . .

[*He becomes silent. Two big tears fall upon his hands.*]

Henri is coming. Do not let him see us weeping. Do not let him know why we are weeping.
[*Henri enters. He is a bronzed, taciturn peasant.*]
Good evening, Henri. We were waiting for you. It is good of you to come so early when we are alone with our thoughts. Madeleine has not yet returned. Did you come by way of the marsh road?

HENRI

No. I came through the meadow . . . through Père Jacquot's meadow.

THE MOTHER

Will you not sit down, Henri?

THE FATHER

You would have met her if you had come by the way of the marsh road. She walks there in the evening.

HENRI

I thought I should find her here . . . I came early . . .

THE MOTHER

She will return soon, Henri.

HENRI

She takes these walks every evening? . . . Every evening?

THE FATHER

Yes.

[*A silence.*]

HENRI

Two of our cows have calved . . . the black one and the one with the big white spot on her side. The black one gave us trouble. We were going to call Père Jacquot, but it became unnecessary later. Now we have two new calves.

THE MOTHER

Two . . . What color are they?

HENRI

They are both black but one of them has a white foot and a white spot on the side like the mother. They are both very big. We shall wean them before the summer ends.

THE FATHER

And the mare, Henri?

HENRI

She will foal in November . . . Will Madeleine return soon? It is becoming so dark . . .

THE MOTHER

She will be here soon, Henri. She always returns before the moon rises.

HENRI

[*Abruptly.*]

I believe Madeleine goes among the marshes when she knows I am coming . . .

THE MOTHER

Henri!

[*The Father rises.*]

HENRI

It seems that she has always had a secret aversion for me. When I touch her hand, she trembles . . . and when I kiss her. She speaks only in answers. I believe she became my betrothed because you wished it. Perhaps she has told you . . .

THE FATHER

[*Gently.*]

She does not love you less, Henri. It is only the sorrow that has come upon her. They were always together, the two . . . You understand . . .

HENRI

. . . She does not wear my ring. I did not see it on her hand the last time. I said nothing to her, however. Does she wear the ring? Have you seen her wear it?

THE MOTHER

The ring . . . I do not remember . . . I think . . . No, I did not see it on her hand when she was sleeping . . . Perhaps she lost it, Henri, and does not wish . . .

THE FATHER

Here is Madeleine.

HENRI

[*Quickly.*]

Do not speak of it to her.

THE FATHER

Madeleine, dear child . . .

[*Madeleine appears at the left, from the background.*]

THE MOTHER

My daughter . . . dearest . . .

MADELEINE

[*Sinks upon the long stone bench.*]

Dear father . . . mother . . .

[*The three are locked in one embrace.*]

THE MOTHER

Madeleine, here is Henri.

MADELEINE

Henri . . .

THE MOTHER

Madeleine, your hand is trembling. You are ill? Tell me, dear child.

THE FATHER

Do not fear to grieve us.

MADELEINE

I am tired.

THE MOTHER

Will you not come into the house, Madeleine?

MADELEINE

Presently . . .

THE FATHER

I am going to put your fauteuil near the window where you can see the stars.

[*The Mother follows him into the house, with a glance toward Henri.*]

HENRI

Madeleine, do not go. I wish to speak to you.

[*Madeleine sinks back upon the bench.*]

Madeleine, you are not wearing my ring . . .

MADELEINE

Your ring . . .

HENRI

I do not see it on your hand. You did not wear it the last time . . .

MADELEINE

It is true . . .

HENRI

Madeleine, what have you done with the ring?

[*Madeleine is silent.*]

Madeleine . . .

MADELEINE

I threw it into the marsh.

HENRI

The marsh!

MADELEINE

[*Voicelessly.*]

He willed it . . .

HENRI

He!

MADELEINE

My lover. I have a lover. He dwells among the marshes. I go to him. He wishes it . . . in the evening . . .

HENRI

You! Madeleine!

MADELEINE

Yes.

HENRI

And your mother, your good mother . . . your father . . .

MADELEINE

They know nothing.

HENRI

Those walks in the evening . . .

MADELEINE

[*Tonelessly.*]

To him.

HENRI

Madeleine . . . I dare not ask you . . . Swear to me by the memory of your sainted sister that you. . . that he . . . that you are still pure . . .

MADELEINE

No.

HENRI

And you, whom we thought so gentle, like a lily . . .

[*Madelene smiles with half-closed eyes.*]

HENRI

Oh, I should strangle you! Brazen harlot . . . You can smile! Oh, how hideous you are . . . your green face . . . your sunken eyes . . . like a corpse in the marshes. I have never seen you so hideous before! All the rotteness of the marshes, all the rotteness of your soul is in your face . . . Oh . . .

[*He goes quickly away.*]

THE STRANGER

[*Emerging from the darkness of the background.*]

Madeleine . . .

MADELEINE

You have come . . .

THE STRANGER

[*In deep vibrating tones.*]

Madeleine, come to me.

MADELEINE

[*Submissively.*]

Yes . . .

THE STRANGER

[*Gently.*]

Madeleine . . .

MADELEINE

Oh, your voice is soft and your eyes gentle . . . yet I tremble . . . I should hate you, for so you betrayed her . . . Yet I am bound to you by every thought, by every fibre of my being. My will is not my own and you are pitiless . . .

THE STRANGER

Madeleine, come with me.

MADELEINE

Oh, my sister would rise from her grave to tear me from your arms . . . She loved you . . .

THE STRANGER

Madeleine, we shall be united forever.

MADELEINE

You betrayed her . . .

THE STRANGER

I swear to you, forever. Madeleine, with me, forever.

MADELEINE

Forever . . .

THE STRANGER

[*In solemn, sonorous tones.*]

Forever.

MADELEINE

Forever . . .

[*They pass slowly toward the background.*]

THE FATHER

[*Within the house.*]

Madeleine, dear child . . .

THE PLAY ENDS

IN THE MARSHES

To

LADY ANNE AZGAPETIAN

IN THE MARSHES

At the rising of the curtain, the scene is plunged in an intense and impenetrable darkness, which, except for one moment later, continues throughout the action of the play.

An oppressive silence reigns, broken or intensified by a sound as of heavy and continuous rain falling on an expanse of water. But the sound is veiled and even merely suggestive.; an interval elapses before it becomes definite in the consciousness of the auditor. At times it grows fainter and apparently ceases; one then vaguely hears a repressed and tearless sobbing, as of exhaustion, mingled with incoherent utterances.

One also hears, but less suggestively, a peculiar rhythmic beating or tapping.

Something offers a gradually weakening resistance to the increasing violence of the wind. A sudden and ringing crash follows. Simultaneously, the noise of the rain as though rendered more audible by the removal of some intervening object rises to the roar of a cataract.

One imagines having heard a shuddering wail of terror. The downpour continues with unabated and overwhelming fury. A lull.

Mother, the wind has broken the panes! Oh, it came so suddenly, I thought my heart would burst with fear. And I was thinking of them, too, at that moment. I thought . . . At first I thought they had come! Did the noise wake him mother, Mother? It seems to me I heard his voice . . . Armande, you are not sleeping? Oh, how can anyone sleep now, and so quietly, as if this terrible darkness were nothing!

Do you hear the rain, Mother? It is coming in like a flood. You can hear it running down the walls through the cracks. It is moving under my feet. Oh, it is so cold . . . so cold! It seems as if I were on a rack when I move. It is the fever . . . Here in this darkness and this dampness . . . The air is poisoned! At times my head burns! It is as though someone thrust a hot needle through my brain! . . . If Jean does not take us away from here tomorrow, we shall all be dead. We cannot endure this longer. The marsh air is poisoning us. It is killing us. Oh, and this darkness! . . . If only the sun were shining . . . even if it were twilight . . . I should not complain. This darkness is terrible! It is like a black veil that clings to the eyes . . . I cannot tear it off. It is like being blind.

How terrible it must be to be blind! Not to see . . . Always to be in darkness . . . always . . . as long as one lives! To have one's eyes open and not to see! To stand in the sunlight and still be in darkness! Oh, and there are so many blind people! Mother, I have

seen them smile sometimes . . . My God! how can they smile in the darkness! What can they do all day? They must think . . . think . . . To do nothing all day but think! Oh, I should go mad. I should kill myself!

They do not fear the darkness. It does not frighten them. Perhaps they think no one will harm them because they are blind. And yet someone may be near . . . near enough to touch them . . . near enough to . . .

Mother, is the door locked? It seems to me I heard . . . No, it is locked. I am sure it is locked. Yes, I am quite certain. How heavy the child is! He weighs like lead in my arms. I am sure it is locked.

I think if I were blind, Mother, I should always want to hear someone's voice and feel someone's hand. It must be terrible to think you are alone when there is someone near! In this darkness it is as though I were blind. My eyes are open and yet I cannot see. If there were someone in this room . . . behind . . . me . . . Mother, is it you whispering? Mother . . .

Mother, oh for the love of the dear God, speak to me! Let me hear your voice! Do not torture me. I am dying with fear. I shall not be afraid if I hear your voice. How cruel you are! You must suffer, too, in this terrible darkness. Why do you hate me so? What have I done? You have always hated me. I do not know why. I try to please you but you are like a stranger. Perhaps it is because I am your son's wife . . . You did not want him to marry me. Oh,

I know! I know! Armande told me. You are angry because he loves me. I have often seen it. Once you wept. You thought I did not see. You think your son must love no one but you. And you hate me, too, because you think we are suffering here through my fault.

Mother, I swear to you I did not tell Armande. I swear it to you by the saints, by my eternal salvation. It was Mère Martin's boy. I knew Armande would stop at nothing if I told him . . . what that man . . . oh . . . I was silent all day. You know yourself I did not answer when he asked me. It was Mère Martin's boy, the little brat! My God! they think because we are peasants we are at their beck and call like any vile townswoman . . . But you do not believe me. You do not believe me. You think I am telling lies . . . Lies! When I swear it by God Himself! Oh, in your heart I know you believe me; but you will not say so. You will not say a single word. Mother, pity me . . . I am suffering. My head burns. Speak to me. Say something to me . . . one word . . . one little word . . . Oh, I shall go mad in this darkness and silence!

Listen, Mother, if you do not speak to me, I shall wake Armande! Do you hear? I shall wake Armande. Speak to me. You know he must sleep . . . sleep will save his life. Mother . . . Armande . . . Armande, Armande! Oh, at least the dog will hear me. Where is the dog? Pataud! Pataud! Here . . . come here! My God! even the dog will not come to me . . . They are pitiless . . . They want to drive me mad!

[*The sound of desperate sobbing.*]

You have the heart of a tiger. You are happy only when you see me suffer. Oh, I shall tell Armande! I shall tell him how cruel you are to me . . . and other things. He will be angry. Oh, you will see! You will see! You know how terrible he is when he is angry. He knows you hate me. He will make you live by yourself in another house, like Mère Ponsonet's son. I can be cruel, too, but it will be your fault, your own fault!

If you will speak to me . . . Mother, if you will speak to me, I shall say nothing to Armande. Oh, if you knew how I am suffering! This dread, this fear is torturing me. In this darkness I feel that something is about to happen . . . something . . . something . . . I do not know what. That is why I suffer. I do not know what I fear. Oh, it seems to me one feels pain only in awaiting it. It is like a whip that hurts before it falls . . . If I could scream . . . But I am afraid . . . Someone may hear me!

Mother, I think the water is rising. The marsh must be flooded with such heavy rains all day. Jean will have to come with a boat tomorrow when . . . Mother, someone laughed . . . near me . . . some one! . . . I heard a laugh! Armande! Mother! Where are you? Let me come to you! Save me! Where are you? Where . . .

[*There is a sudden and lingering flash of lightning, followed almost immediately by a deafening roll of*

thunder. In the brilliant glare the scene is for one brief moment revealed. One sees the interior of a hut, whose rafters sloping upwards and towards the spectator, give an impression of size to the room greater than its actual dimensions. This effect is intensified by its absolute bareness.

From above, heavy masses of cobwebs, the accumulation of many years, sway noiselessly and with a certain regularity of movement.

There is a window in the back, but the panes are shattered and lie in fragments on the sill and floor. Through it one sees the branches of a willow tree silhouetted against the livid sky. These, under the fury of the wind, which seems to endow them with life, hiss through the air like whips and beat wildly against the window.

A dense mist enters through every aperture and hangs heavily in the air. It is the deadly miasma of the marshes.

The walls sweat. Their exhudations glide down in huge drops and mingle with the green slime which covers the floor.

From under the closed door at the right, a stream of water enters, gathering in a shallow depression in the middle of the room where the floor has sunken.

In this pool one sees the crouched and motionless figure of a woman. Her face cannot be seen, for her hand is raised as if to ward off a blow. She has an infant on her knees, almost hidden by her luxuriant black hair.

In the back corner at the left, there are two human figures. One, a young man, is lying on a pallet of decaying rushes, with a blood-stained rag about his head. A large mongrel lies shivering at his feet. Beside him, her emaciated hands still clutching a rusty fowling piece, is an old woman, his mother. Her fallen jaw, the posture of her head, give to her face the appearance of a silent and horrible laugh. Both are quite dead. Already the loathsome creatures of the marsh have taken possession of the bodies.

Darkness suddenly obliterates the scene.]

I am coming! I am coming! Oh where are you, Mother? Armande . . . Armande, how can you sleep when I suffer so! How can you lie there so quietly when your own mother tortures me! Oh, God! Pity me! Light! Light! A little light . . . one ray . . . Where are you, Mother? I feel I am near you. Where . . . I am coming . . . I am coming . . . I am coming . . .

Ah . . . Thank God! Armande, I shall not be afraid now! Armande! Armande! Mother! He is cold . . . cold! I do not hear him breathe! His heart . . . it does not beat . . . No! He is dead! He is dead! Armande! Armande!

Mother, Armande is dead! He is dead! Mother, where are you? Mother . . . Help! She is dead . . . She is dead! They are both dead . . . I am alone in the darkness . . . Alone with the dead!

[*Above the mighty roar of the cataclysm, three prolonged screams are heard in rising tones of supreme horror. Something falls.*

The storm has now reached the height of its fury. One hears the raging of the wind and the menacing rush of waters. The elements seem to be at war.

A long, a very long pause.]

I did not know what she wanted. I did not know. I did not know. I did not know. She came to the door. I do not know whence she came. She seemed to rise from the marsh, from the ground. And she came to the door. I do not know what she wanted. I do not know. I do not know. I do not know.

What did she want? Why did she come here, that woman with the dead face? Oh, the old devil! Just because he is rich . . . Armande! No! No! For the love of God, do not go! Do not go! Do not let him go! He will kill him . . . Oh, they are pitiless, the monsters . . . Mother, cling to him. Twine yourself about him. Cry! Scream! Weep! Oh, do not let him go . . . Do not let him go! They want to kill him . . . They are pitiless . . . Dead! Dead! They are dead. They are dead. They are all dead. All . . . That woman, too . . .

Mother, I know he recognizes Armande. He smiles and kicks his little legs, the angel! I believe he is really beginning to speak. Yesterday . . . Yesterday . . . She is looking for her child who was lost in the marshes . . . Oh, how his breath stinks! And his big watery eyes . . . like a frog . . . and his

fat belly . . . Oh, I did not tell him, I swear to you I did not tell him . . . It was Mère Martin's boy, the little bastard. He sees everything with his big eyes, like a frog . . . a frog . . .

She seeks everywhere for her lost child. He played near the marshes one day. She will never find him. For he is dead . . . dead . . . The willows weep, but they will not tell her. They know! They know! Under their roots . . . but they will not tell her. They only weep. Oh, she would dig the ground with her hands if they told her . . . down to their roots! She would tear up the roots of the willows to find her child . . .

The lilies know . . . but they will not tell her. They dare not tell her. Oh, she would tear them up! She would crush them under her feet if she knew. It was they who called to him. It was they who nodded to him . . . They no longer sing. They are silent and pale now. They hang their heads.

She seeks everywhere . . . everywhere. Yesterday she found his little shoe. His little shoe! She is looking for him . . . She seemed to rise from the ground . . . from the marsh. Her hair was covered with wet slime . . . long hair . . . green . . . and her forehead. Oh, and her eyes . . . She had no eyes . . . only holes that burned . . . green fire. My God! why does she always smile? What does she want? Yesterday she came to the door. I did not see her come. She seemed to rise from the ground . . . from the marsh.

I think she was hungry. If she could speak she would have asked for something to eat. But she did not speak. She only looked at me and smiled . . . and at the baby. The water was dripping from her hair . . . from her clothes . . . from her fingers . . . green water . . . from her mouth. She bent down and kissed the baby. What right had she? She did not ask me. What right has she to kiss my baby? Her lips are poisoned. The snakes have slept on her lips.

I did not speak to her. I was afraid. But she only smiled and went away. She went into the marsh. The cypresses were calling to her. They were waving their arms. My God! why does she smile? Why does she always smile? She frightens me! I am afraid of her! She wants my child. Yes, that is why she came. That is why she kissed him. She is lonely here in the marshes. She is cold. She wants to feel his little arms around her neck. She wants to feel his warm little lips on her breast . . .

We must escape from here. She will come back. She will come back for my baby. We must escape before she comes back. Mother, quick! Let us escape! Armande, give me your hand . . . quick . . . your hand . . . before she comes back . . .

Mother, she is at the window . . . She is looking in . . . at the child! She is smiling! She has come for the child . . . Mother, she is moving away from the window. Mother, I hear her steps in the water. She is coming to the door . . . Throw yourself

against it! Lock it! Cry! Scream! Do not let her in . . . Mother, I hear her hand on the door. She is feeling for the knob. Mother, she is opening the door . . . She is on the threshold . . . Mother, she is coming . . . She is coming . . . I can hear her breathing. She is coming . . . No! No! . . . My baby . . . Help! Devil! Monster! . . . No! No!

THE PLAY ENDS

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